

Man-Making

Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood



Why Men Don't Mentor Boys

By Earl Hipp, M.A.

Adolescent boys have no choice. They are being ruthlessly propelled by their biology toward manhood. The all-too-obvious and sad fact is that too many of them are left alone in this difficult transition... left to puzzle out manhood alone. As a result, the world is full of boys starving from the lack of adult male nutrients, some going horribly off course, and many dying, all because men aren't showing up as mentors and elders in their lives.

In this tragic drama, the piece that is less obvious is that, just as the boys are hardwired for and desperately need input from men, men are hardwired for and need a connection to the boys. Men need to step into the mentor and elder roles in order to find *their* place in the natural and ancient male hierarchy. Men need to mentor boys in order to heal their old and forgotten adolescent wounds, in order to connect across the generations, in order to become fully developed and mature adult males. When men don't show up to mentor boys, both boys and men are destined to wander alone in the dangerous never-never land between boyhood and manhood, searching for answers to questions they don't know how to ask.

On the [website](#) created for my book, *Man-Making: Men Helping Boys on Their Journey to Manhood*, I asked men from all over the world about what blocks their willingness to be mentors and man-makers for boys. Their [responses](#), available on the website, included very high levels of confusion, fear, and denial. Incredibly, with thousands of boys in every part of the country on long wait lists for male mentors, many men stated they weren't aware of any boy who needed an adult male in his life. Others were hiding behind the rationale that they were living over-committed lives and just couldn't find the time. But by far, the most common responses reflected a generalized fear of not being up to the task. In a variety of ways men said, "I don't think I have anything to offer," or, "I wouldn't know what to do." In their stories men were articulating a deep fear. They were afraid that because of their perceived deficiencies they would fail the boy and the boy would be injured or damaged in some way.

Another common set of fears about mentoring boys men expressed in my research was that the relationship *would* work. In the responses of men who hadn't yet mentored a boy were fears of intimacy. Many had concerns that a boy "may really want to know me," fear that a boy "would ask me difficult questions that would stir my gut," or that "he'd ask questions I haven't found answers for myself." Men also expressed fears of over-involvement, that once the relationship got started, "I won't be able to get out," or that "the boy will actually come to depend on me and need me in his life." Sadly, these statements reflect powerful fears a man would become trapped in a relationship he couldn't manage, where he'd not measure up and wouldn't have enough to offer.

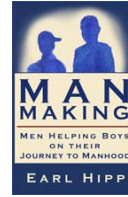
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The notion that makes me the angriest about the current plight of men and boys is when men expressed the fear of what people would think about their interest in boys. It's a horribly tragic statement of our times, when boys are suffering, feeling lost, being imprisoned in droves, and some dying from lack of male attention, that a man who wants to mentor a boy has to overcome the fear his interest will be labeled predatory, perverted, or unnatural in some way.

All of these fears testify to the degree to which our society has degraded this important role for men. These fears speak to what men have forgotten about their own hunger for mentoring and elders on their journey to manhood. They speak to how men are out of touch with and confused about their own masculine power, and their natural and needed place in the order of the male universe.

It's important for men to learn that having any or all these fears is normal, that they are not alone with these feelings, that a little training will greatly minimize their fears... and that fear is not a reason to avoid mentoring a boy. As the expression goes, courage is fear that doesn't control you, and a little courage is really all that's required for a man to make an enormous difference in the life of a boy who, right now, is starving for his influence.

I'm reminded of a men's group that decided to take a risk and spend one evening a month at a facility for court-adjudicated boys. They reported that the men and boys took a little time to get to know each other and to learn how to "hang out" together. At the closing of their first full meeting, one of the boys stood up and asked the men, "What took you guys so long to get here?"

As I demonstrate in the Man-Making book, every man can do *something* to make a positive difference in a boy's life. ***Whether they realize it or not***, men can **naturally** unfold, value, contain, nurture, inspire, and guide the restless and extremely physical energy of adolescent males. If a man's heart is at all open and he engages a boy at some level, the boy and the man are both moved along on their journey toward a positive, proud, and successful manhood.

Every time I read another story about a lost young male causing himself and others pain because of foolish or violent behavior, my heart breaks . . . again. It's really the boys calling out for help. My hope and prayer is that the men in your community will hear this call to action. Everyone needs men to step up and play this important and necessary role... but especially the boys. They know the men have their answers and they are waiting.

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Earl Hipp

Earl Hipp, M.A., is an author and professional speaker. Since 1985 he has published seven books for young people on topics such as stress, grief & loss, self-esteem, and violence prevention. Taken together Earl's books have sold over a half-million copies. *Man-Making – Men Helping Boys on their Journey to Manhood*, his most recent book, was published in the fall of 2006.

To learn more about Earl, how this book came to be written, or to order a copy of the book, use [this link](#) to visit the Man-Making website. You may also want to visit the [Man-Making Blog](#), a regularly-updated collection of ideas, stories, books, program descriptions, articles, and website reviews related to the topic of man-making.

On the [Man-Making website](#) you can learn about Earl's conference programs and workshops. You'll also find a growing list of articles, recommended books, films, websites, and model programs focused on the man-making challenge.

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<http://www.man-making.com>

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